

Worship - May 5, 2013

Lighting of the Candle:

As we come now to form this community,
we each bring our light with us.
Let us gather all that light together in one place.
We see God in our light that shines here.

Story Time: "Blessing of the Hikers for Hospice"

- Hospice is a volunteer-based program that helps people in the community that are experiencing advanced illness, death, and grief.
- listen to people who are sad
- spend time with people who are afraid
- read to people
- run errands
- cooking
- housework

Try to make people feel peaceful and cared for when they are having a hard time.

One: When we gather on Sunday mornings,
we receive the gifts we need
to serve God in our lives.
When we exit out of the church doors,
we become the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

We ask God's blessing now on
Jennifer, Karen Elliott, Charlotte, and Janice Flinn,
Karen Flinn, Dorma, Lorna, and Joan,
Janis Wall, Yasmine, and Ali
as they go into the community
and represent our church at the Hike for Hospice.

Go forth with God's strength
and our blessing to offer your time and energy
toward the comfort and healing of others. Amen.

First Reading: John 14:23-29

23Jesus answered him,
'Those who love me will keep my word,
and my Father will love them,
and we will come to them
and make our home with them.

24Whoever does not love me does not keep my words;
and the word that you hear is not mine,
but is from the Father who sent me.

25 'I have said these things to you while I am still with you.
26But the Advocate,* the Holy Spirit, whom the Father
will send in my name,
will teach you everything,
and remind you of all that I have said to you.

27Peace I leave with you;
my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled,
and do not let them be afraid.

28You heard me say to you,
"I am going away, and I am coming to you."
If you loved me, you would rejoice
that I am going to the Father,
because the Father is greater than I.
29And now I have told you this before it occurs,
so that when it does occur, you may believe.

Sermon: Act 6 - Lydia

Introduction

The Season of Easter is coming to an end.
I'm sad that there's only one more week after this.
Because during the Season of Easter,
we have been hearing these amazing stories
from the people of the Early Church;
stories that we don't often delve into.

Can anyone remember which characters we've looked at so far?

- ⤴ Peter
- ⤴ Saul
- ⤴ Dorcas
- ⤴ The Gentiles

Their stories are interesting and important.
Mostly they are important because
they help us to think about our own stories and our own lives.

Your story is important too.
Today, I want you to consider
that what you do and who you are - your story -

influences and affects other people
in ways that you may never know about.

There's a great quote that comes from Spiderman.
Well, it might actually come from the French philosopher Voltaire
but I know it from Spiderman.
For those of you who are not familiar with the superhero universe,
Spiderman is really a teenager named Peter Parker.
And one day, after Peter has discovered his superpowers,
his Uncle Ben said to him:
"With great power comes great responsibility."
That's a fantastic quote to remember.
How do we use our power responsibly?

Lydia

The Book of Acts gives us a great story
about a woman named Lydia
to help us consider this.

Now, the story of Lydia is proof
that one can say a lot with just a few words.
Patricia read to us a mere five verses of Lydia's story.
You wouldn't think you could say very much in five verses, right?
Well, you might be surprised.
Let's see what happens when we flesh out the details,
with a little help from a book
titled *Women of the Bible*
by Ann Spangler and Jean Syswerda.

We go back now to the city of Philippi in Macedonia
where Lydia meets the apostle Paul for the first time.

The wind rustled the branches overhead
until they became a swaying canopy
whose shadow danced across the circle of women
bowed in prayer.
It didn't matter that Philippi had too few Jews to support a synagogue;
the river's edge had become their place of worship --
a green sanctuary where they gathered each Sabbath to pray.

A woman named Lydia was there that day,
on the edges,
watching it all unfold.
Lydia was not Jewish,
so she would have been known as a Gentile.
She had come to Philippi from Asia Minor

and was a prominent businesswoman
who sold fine cloth to those who could afford it.
The cloth was prized for its purple colour.

Lydia listened as a stranger from Tarsus
invoked the familiar words of the Shema,
which was the central prayer of morning worship.
He said: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Such prayers were like a gust of wind, fanning her longing.
Though not a Jew, she wanted to know this God
powerful enough to part the sea
yet tender enough to yearn for the love of his people.

Paul was a preacher
who went from town to town telling people about Jesus.
He told them the story of Jesus' life:
how he had taught great things,
how he had been murdered for his convictions,
how he continued to live on through his followers.
The women sat quietly as Paul told the story.
Even the branches overhead had stopped their noisy rustling.
But in the stillness,
Lydia felt a strong wind rushing through her.
Tears rolled down her cheeks
even though she felt like singing.

Afterward, she was baptized in the Gangites River nearby.
In fact, so strong was her faith
that her entire household followed her example
and they were baptized too.
Amazed by Lydia's commitment,
others in the community turned to the faith too.
After this,
Lydia insisted that Paul and Silas and probably Timothy and Luke too
accept her hospitality
and come and stay in her home.

Philippi seemed an unlikely place to plant the gospel.
It was a prosperous Roman colony
located on the main highway
linking the eastern provinces to Rome
and its citizens included large numbers of retired Roman soldiers.

Despite its size, however,

Philippi hadn't even enough Jews to provide the required quorum of ten reliable males to form a synagogue-- and it had always been Paul's habit to preach at the synagogue first. Even so, Philippi did have its group of praying Jewish and Gentile women.

Interestingly, Paul had not planned to visit Philippi but had been on his way to Asia when he felt called to turn aside. Soon afterward, he had a vision in which a man of Macedonia begged him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Days later, he found himself on the riverbank, preaching to the women who had gathered there for prayer.

Shortly after Lydia's conversion, Paul and Silas were thrown in prison for upsetting the Roman authorities. And we'll hear more about that next week. Anyway, after they were released, Lydia once again extended hospitality and invited them into her home and cared for them. In the short time that they had been away, Lydia had started a house church and the faithful were gathered there. Her home may have become the very center of the church in Philippi.

Lydia has the distinction of being Paul's first convert in Europe and the first member of the church at Philippi, a community that later became a source of great comfort to the Paul when he was again imprisoned.

Perhaps her prayers, joined with those of the other women gathered at the riverbank, helped prepare the way for the gospel to be planted in Europe. And as we all know, the church in Europe was the key to spreading Christianity to the rest of the world.

Conclusion

I am sure that Lydia did not fully understand the power that she held. Luckily, she took her responsibility to be a good person seriously. This affected all of those around her and then some. Her simple actions of commitment, love and hospitality helped to set the church on a certain path.

Now, we might not see ourselves as having a lot of power.
We might not own our own businesses.
We might not have valuable goods that are desired by others.
We might not lead our own churches.
We might not have influential friends.
But each of us has great power in our lives.
What we do matters.
When we realize this,
it changes how we live our lives dramatically.
And it changes other peoples lives too.

So, this week, I challenge you
live every day as if it matter, because it does.
And to do every thing as if it will affect someone else, because it will.
And, at the end of the week, see how you lived your life differently.

So, what is that you hear Lydia saying to you today?

Prayer over the Gifts:

Gracious God,
Jesus extended to us the offer of immeasurable peace.
We praise your name in the comfort of this peace
and place these offerings before you.
Multiply these gifts
so that those seeking to establish peace in this world
will feel your guiding hand.
We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Prayers of the People:

God, as we raise our prayers together now,
we anticipate your Spirit moving within us
and transforming us ever more into the people you are
calling us to become.

We have much to celebrate this week for life is good.
We celebrate beautiful weather and time spent enjoying nature.
We celebrate organizations that do great work like Hospice Fredericton
and Habitat for Humanity,
which has been honoured for disability inclusion in housing programs.
We also celebrate those committed to the environment and technological advance
as a solar-powered plane had a successful flight in the US this week.

But we also cry out to you, God of all creation,
on behalf of all who are abused and neglected,

sold into slavery,
and treated as objects
to satisfy the desires of others.
Come quickly, O God, to guide us
as we seek to end these abuses of human rights.

God, you have promised to help us recreate this world
as your kingdom,
where your presence is overwhelming.
We hold in prayer the many areas of the globe
still over-run with violence and struggle.
May your love and grace be known
throughout the world, but especially in:
--Syria, which is still in the throes of great political upheaval,
--Libya, where armed protests continue to disturb the peace, and
--North Korea, where tensions have increased

And all this we pray,
just as Jesus taught the disciples to pray, saying:

Sharing the Light:

As we leave now to go back into the world,
we each take some light with us.
As others see our light,
they will know that God shines in us.

Blessing:

As we go forth from this place,
we know that the mystery of God
is larger than we can comprehend.
But we go ready to allow wonder
and the sense of what is holy
into our hearts.
May God illumine our lives this week. Amen.